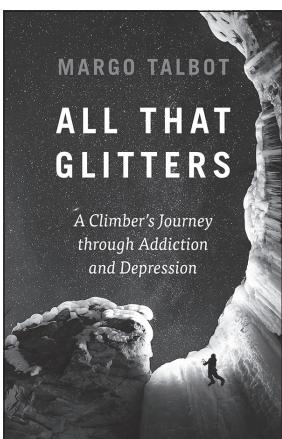


how Preuss dealt with anti-Semitism and how Comici idolized the fascist dictator Benito Mussolini. Smart offers surprising discoveries, such as how Preuss climbed with the children of psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud.

One complaint I have is that Smart did not include the grades of these century-old climbs according to the Yosemite Decimal System, so I was constantly checking Mountain Project and SummitPost to get a better appreciation for the bold climbing that was done with rudimentary equipment and “basketball shoes.” It also would have been helpful to have more context into how these figures fit into the greater historical arc of climbing. Passing mentions of Alex Honnold seemed to have been hastily added, and there was no mention of New England’s Henry Barber and Canada’s Peter Croft, two of the greatest solo free-climbers and logical extensions of Preuss and Comici.

Given how neatly these two books fit together, I wondered why I wasn’t reading one big book that pulled together the lives of these pioneers. I only hope that Smart will deliver more. Preuss, the lord of the abyss, died in 1913 while soloing. Comici, the angel, died in 1940 when his rope frayed. Only the devil lived to old age.

—Stephen Kurczy



### All That Glitters: A Climber's Journey through Addiction and Depression

By Margo Talbot

*Rocky Mountain Books, 2020, 186 pages.*

*ISBN: 978-1-77160-433-8. Price: \$25 (paperback).*

MARGO TALBOT’S SEARING MEMOIR IS A SIREN call to untold numbers of people: Heed the hidden maladies that lurk beneath the surface. People aren’t always what they project to the world, just as the glittering ice that Talbot dedicates her life to climbing can be different than it appears.

Strike that apparently solid uniform ice with an axe, and cracks spread every which way, to the core.

Talbot emerged a climber after decades of depressive episodes and destructive behavior. “I had come to understand that depression was an internal struggle on an invisible battlefield,” Talbot writes late in her memoir. “While my physically injured peers were being taken out to luncheons and showered

with books and gifts to keep them busy in their convalescence I hunkered down for another solo journey into the depths of my own psychic hell.”

*All That Glitters* begins with the story of Talbot’s troubled childhood in New Brunswick, Canada. Talbot traces the roots of her lifelong battles with depression to the absence of parental love. Her family life was devoid of physical affection or even words of affirmation. Her mother seemed to reserve her love for Talbot’s younger brother. Vague allusions to sexual abuse—which we learn about toward the end—appear here and there. The one refuge the young Talbot finds, even at an early age, is solitude in nature.

In years of therapy, Talbot writes, the two “immutable laws of psychology” she learned are that “depression is repressed anger, and anger is repressed sadness.” That anger and sadness are palpable throughout the book. Talbot brings us into her all-encompassing, debilitating depression through a prose that is sparse yet visual. Late in the book , after her boyfriend Grant has left her, Talbot says she “fell into the abyss that had been waiting for me all my life.”

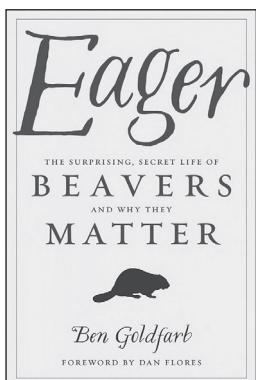
The core of the memoir, the backbone that leads the reader from one episode into another, is how Talbot *deals* with said depression. One way is through relationships with men like Grant: One boyfriend beats her; another, in a plotline straight out of a Hollywood potboiler, uses her as a means of reducing suspicion from the authorities during his international drug-smuggling escapades. But the main way she self-medicates is with drugs and alcohol. Talbot recalls starting drinking when she was barely a teenager. She can outdrink all the boys and has blackouts where she doesn’t remember a thing. Though she goes through periods of sobriety, alcohol serves as a gateway drug, and by the time she is in her 20s and 30s, Talbot has gone through an acid phase, a cocaine phase, and even a freebase phase.

The third act of *All That Glitters* is where climbing comes in—a redemption of sorts. Talbot returns to nature and redisCOVERS the soothing qualities that drew her to it as a young girl. Through mentorship from other climbers in the Canmore, Alberta area, she becomes an ace ice climber, tackling classic routes like The Weeping Pillar (rated WI 6, a very difficult climb on seasonal waterfall ice). Ice climbing evolves from simply an outlet that “kept her sane” to the animating and central focus of her life. The people she meets—especially the strong female figures—are the most supportive she has ever known; she becomes a successful and sought-after climbing guide, even guiding clients on Antarctica’s highest peak, Mount Vinson. By the end of the book, an older and wiser Talbot has learned many lessons, not the least of which is that she too deserves to be happy.

Counterintuitively, the crux passage in this memoir of a climber of frozen waterfalls has no climbing or movement in it whatsoever. Talbot recounts sitting in a chaise longue in her apartment, staring out the window for sixteen hours, and feeling like she had “spent the afternoon with Death, and that he and I had talked things through and come to a bargain.” Upon emerging from her meditative dream state, Talbot feels “calmer than I had in years, not happy, but indifferent, unequivocal, impassive.” “That day I had a feeling in my bones that my years of depression were over,” she writes.

Of course, it’s never quite as easy as that. As someone who struggles with depression myself, and who has used—and written about—how I self-medicate with climbing, Talbot’s story is one of both hope and caution: It is not a how-to manual for coping with grief or despair, but an anecdotal investigation that says: *Hey, like me, you also deserve to be happy. But it takes work.*

—Michael Levy



## Eager: The Surprising, Secret Life of Beavers and Why They Matter

By Ben Goldfarb

Chelsea Green Publishing, 2018, 287 pages.

ISBN-13: 978-1-60358-739-6. Price: \$17.95  
(paperback).

WHEN HISTORIANS LOOK BACK AT THE ANIMALS that have had the greatest impact on the evolution of our nation, they often focus on the horse, which provided settlers with transportation; the buffalo, which once roamed the prairie in vast herds, offering Native Americans sustenance and clothing from their hides; the cow, whose milk became a household staple; and the ox, which helped farmers move rocks and plow fields.

In his informatively fascinating book, *Eager: The Surprising, Secret Life of Beavers and Why They Matter*, Ben Goldfarb makes the case that the large, semiaquatic rodents have shaped the landscape by building dams and have influenced many other aspects of our culture.

He writes, “Practically since humans first dispersed across North America via the Bering Land Bridge—replicating a journey that beavers made repeatedly millions of years prior—the rodents have featured in the religions, cultures, and diets of indigenous peoples, from the nations of